

MASTERCRAFTMEN PROFESSIONAL BODIES AND ITS ROLE AT PROMOTING APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Apprenticeship has historically served as a vital mechanism for skill acquisition and economic mobility in Nigeria. Central to this system are Mastercraft men professional bodies, which function as custodians of trade knowledge in diverse fields such as carpentry, tailoring, welding, and construction. This position paper explores the evolving role of these professional bodies in transforming Nigeria's apprenticeship system amidst contemporary challenges including technological shifts, informality, inadequate resources, and weak regulatory frameworks. Drawing on the guild model and empirical insights, the paper highlights the contributions of these bodies in standardizing training, certifying apprentices, advocating for policy reforms, and fostering innovation and market access. Despite these efforts, the sector faces significant obstacles such as limited government support, generational skill gaps, fragmented representation, and persistent societal stigma. The paper argues that repositioning Mastercraft men professional bodies as strategic partners in national development is essential for creating a dynamic, inclusive, and future-ready apprenticeship framework. It concludes by recommending stronger policy alignment, increased funding, and public-private partnerships to enhance the sustainability and impact of vocational education in Nigeria.

Keyword: Mastercraft Men, Apprenticeship, Vocational Training

Introduction

Apprenticeship has long been a cornerstone of vocational education and skill acquisition in Nigeria, serving as an essential pathway for economic mobility and sectoral growth. For centuries, the informal training system in Nigeria has connected novice workers (apprentices) with experienced artisans (Mastercraft men), facilitating the transfer of valuable skills in fields such as carpentry, tailoring, welding, and metalworking. This apprenticeship system has not only empowered individuals to gain practical, hands-on experience but has also contributed significantly to the development of key sectors of the economy (Adebayo & Oduro, 2017). However, as global technological advancements

and economic shifts redefine the landscape of work, the traditional apprenticeship model has faced increasing challenges, including issues of standardization, inadequate resources, and the need for alignment with modern market demands (Oluwatayo, 2020).

While the informal nature of apprenticeship in Nigeria has enabled many to acquire trade skills, the sustainability and broader impact of this system have come under scrutiny. This has led to calls for the involvement of professional bodies to streamline and formalize the training process. In this context, Mastercraft men and their professional associations play a critical role in adapting the apprenticeship system

to meet contemporary needs. These bodies not only provide mentorship, resources, and a structured framework for the training process, but they also bridge the gap between traditional skill acquisition methods and the evolving requirements of the modern economy (Adedeji & Adebayo, 2020). Despite their significant role, the influence and potential of these professional bodies in promoting and advancing the apprenticeship system in Nigeria, they are often underappreciated (Salami, 2018).

This position paper posits that Mastercraft men, in collaboration with their professional bodies, are integral to the transformation and success of Nigeria's apprenticeship system. Their involvement is crucial in refining training processes, advocating for policies that align vocational education with market needs, and ensuring the system's adaptability to future economic demands. As the Nigerian apprenticeship system navigates these challenges, the paper will argue that a more strategic role for professional bodies is necessary to foster a more dynamic, accessible, and sustainable framework. By analysing the contributions of these bodies to the apprenticeship ecosystem, this paper will highlight their central role in advancing vocational training in Nigeria and the broader impact on national economic growth (Ogunyemi, 2017).

Mastercraft Men Professional Bodies in Nigeria

Mastercraft men in Nigeria are individuals who have attained high skill levels in various trades, such as carpentry, plumbing, blacksmithing, tailoring, and others. These skilled workers often form professional bodies or trade unions to represent their interests, protect their rights, and ensure the sustainability of their craft. Mastercraft

men professional bodies refer to organized associations or institutions that represent and regulate the interests of skilled artisans (master craftsmen) in various trades and professions. These bodies are established to ensure high standards of practice, advocate for the professional development of their members, and promote formal and standardized training systems, including apprenticeships.

The Transformative Role and Achievement of Nigerian Mastercraftsmen Professional Bodies: Insights from the Guild Model

Drawing inspiration from the guild model proposed by de la Croix et al. (2018), Nigerian mastercraftsmen professional bodies hold immense potential to serve as catalysts for economic transformation. Historically, guilds played multifaceted roles and achievement in standard-setting, training, market access, and innovation diffusion. Similarly, contemporary mastercraftsmen associations in Nigeria are already performing key functions that align with these historical precedents' functions that, if strengthened, could drive sustainable development, skill acquisition, and inclusive economic growth.

❖ Standardisation of Training (Role as Regulators of Standards and Quality)

One of the foundational roles of professional bodies is establishing clear guidelines and standards for training apprentices. By institutionalizing a structured training framework, these bodies ensure that skills passed on from mastercraftsmen align with current industry expectations. According to Folarin (2019), this alignment is critical for labor market relevance. In the guild

tradition, such standardization ensured consistent quality and preserved trade integrity, an outcome modern Nigerian professional bodies can replicate to enhance the credibility and global competitiveness of local artisans.

❖ **Certification and Recognition (Role as Trainers and Certifiers)**

Professional bodies also function as certifying authorities, validating the skills of apprentices upon successful training completion. This certification not only adds credibility to the apprentice's profile but also boosts their employability in both formal and informal sectors. Akinyemi (2018) notes that employers are more inclined to engage certified artisans, recognizing their training as legitimate and quality-assured. Echoing the guild model, this role establishes a formal path to mastery and career progression, laying the groundwork for a skilled, recognized workforce.

❖ **Advocacy for the Value of Apprenticeship (Role in Advocacy and Policy Influence)**

Mastercraftsmen professional bodies actively advocate for the recognition of vocational training as a vital component of national development. They engage with policymakers and society to reposition apprenticeship as a viable and prestigious career path. Oluwaseun (2017) argues that this advocacy helps counter the dominance of academic qualifications and supports a more balanced, skills-based labor market. This

mirrors the guilds' political influence in shaping policies favorable to artisanal trades and preserving vocational legacies.

❖ **Networking and Collaboration (Role in Innovation and Knowledge Sharing)**

These professional bodies create essential platforms for knowledge exchange and innovation by connecting mastercraftsmen, apprentices, and industry stakeholders. Such networks are vital for sharing best practices, adopting new technologies, and fostering innovation; key drivers of productivity and adaptability. Duru (2020) emphasizes the power of collaborative learning in advancing traditional crafts. Guilds historically functioned as hubs of innovation diffusion, a role that Nigerian associations can emulate to keep artisans competitive in a rapidly changing global market.

❖ **Economic Empowerment and Job Creation (Role in Social and Economic Inclusion)**

Through the structured apprenticeship model, professional bodies contribute directly to job creation, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment. Okojie (2016) highlights the ripple effect of training: many apprentices eventually become entrepreneurs, thereby extending the cycle of skill transfer and economic participation. This aligns with the guild model's emphasis on inclusion and local development, particularly by formalizing informal labor, integrating youth and

women, and stimulating microenterprise growth.

❖ **Gatekeeping Market Access (Role as Gatekeepers of Market Access)**

By organizing artisans into formal bodies, these professional organizations help regulate trade practices, ensure fair competition, and support members in accessing both domestic and international markets. As in traditional guilds, such gatekeeping enhances collective bargaining power and opens opportunities for artisans to participate in broader economic systems.

Examples of Mastercraftmen Professional Bodies in Nigeria:

- i. **Nigerian Institute of Builders (NIOB):** This is a professional body in the building and construction industry. It promotes the training and certification of master craftsmen in construction-related trades like bricklaying, plumbing, and electrical work. The NIOB helps to regulate these professionals, ensuring that apprenticeships and training meet high standards.
- ii. **The National Association of Tailors and Fashion Designers of Nigeria (NATFAD):** This is a professional body for tailors and fashion designers in Nigeria. It provides training, promotes high standards, and works to ensure that apprentices and practitioners are recognized as professionals in the fashion and tailoring industry.

iii. **Automobile Technicians Association of Nigeria (ATA):**

This organization supports master craftsmen working in the automobile repair industry. It offers training programs and certification for mechanics and repair technicians, ensuring that they are up-to-date with new technologies and techniques in the automobile industry.

iv. **National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW):**

While not exclusively a mastercraftsmen association, this body helps regulate certain vocational skills associated with transport, including the training of drivers and artisans in the transportation sector.

v. **National Association of Plumbing and Pipefitters of Nigeria (NAPPN):**

This body oversees training, certification, and best practices for plumbers and pipefitters across Nigeria. They ensure that individuals working in these trades are properly trained and qualified.

Challenges Facing Mastercraftsmen Professional Bodies in Nigeria

Mastercraftsmen professional bodies in Nigeria, which represent and regulate skilled artisans across various trades, have the potential to drive significant economic growth and foster innovation. However, these bodies face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness, particularly in promoting the apprenticeship system and vocational education. These challenges, which are both structural and socio-economic in nature, limit the broader impact of these bodies and restrict the development of

skilled artisans within the country. Addressing these issues is essential not only for improving the apprenticeship system but also for advancing skill acquisition, which is critical to the overall development of the Nigerian economy. Drawing from the study and other perspectives, the following issues emerge as particularly prominent.

i. Lack of Government Support and Funding

A major challenge for Mastercraftsmen Professional Bodies is the lack of substantial government support and investment. While these bodies advocate for the apprenticeship system, there is insufficient funding dedicated to skills development and vocational education. This lack of public funding significantly limits the sustainability and reach of apprenticeship programs. Ajayi (2020) argues that a robust public-private partnership is crucial for ensuring the long-term viability of the apprenticeship model, yet this support remains largely absent.

ii. Informality of the System

The apprenticeship system in Nigeria remains largely informal, with minimal regulation or oversight. Most apprenticeships occur outside formal educational institutions, making it difficult to track progress or maintain quality control. Ogundele (2021) suggests that professional bodies need to collaborate more closely with government agencies to formalize apprenticeship programs and ensure that they meet required standards. This informality, combined with the lack of structured learning environments, reduces the ability of mastercraftsmen to produce a workforce that is truly competitive in the global market.

iii. Inconsistent Employment Practices

As highlighted in the study by Akanni et al. (2022), the employment practices within the craftsman sector are inconsistent and often precarious. Many mastercraftsmen are employed on casual or short-term contracts, which undermines their motivation and performance. Job insecurity and a lack of benefits such as health insurance or pension plans contribute to high turnover rates, poor craftsmanship, and low job satisfaction. Inconsistent employment practices create an environment where the quality of work can vary, and the continuity of skill development is hindered.

iv. Generational Knowledge Gap

The shift toward formal education over vocational training has created a generational knowledge gap. With fewer young people opting for craftsman careers, traditional skills are at risk of being lost. Professional bodies need to adapt the master-apprentice model to include modern technological advances, ensuring that craftsmanship evolves with the times. The failure to integrate technology into traditional crafts can further alienate younger generations from entering the field, exacerbating the skills shortage.

v. Limited Formal Training and Certification

A critical issue is the lack of formal training and certification programs within many mastercraftsmen professional bodies. Most training occurs through informal apprenticeships, with few opportunities for structured learning or certification. As noted in the Akanni et al. (2022) study, craftsmen with formal education and certification tend to perform better, yet only a

small percentage of artisans have access to such resources. This gap between informal training and professional certification limits the competitiveness of Nigerian artisans, both domestically and internationally.

vi. Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

Many mastercraftsmen work in poorly equipped environments with limited access to modern tools, technology, and materials. This challenge is worsened by insufficient financial resources within professional bodies, leaving them unable to provide the necessary tools and training resources to improve their members' skills and productivity. Without adequate infrastructure, mastercraftsmen cannot keep pace with the evolving demands of industries such as construction, manufacturing, and design.

vii. Lack of Regulatory Enforcement

While professional bodies are tasked with setting and enforcing standards, the lack of effective regulatory enforcement is a significant challenge. The absence of stringent oversight leads to inconsistent practices, substandard work, and the entry of unqualified individuals into the trade. This undermines the integrity of the profession, damages its reputation, and reduces consumer trust in the products and services provided by mastercraftsmen.

viii. Fragmented Representation and Lack of Unity

The sector suffers from fragmentation, with multiple associations and unions representing different groups of mastercraftsmen. This lack of unity diminishes the ability of professional bodies to advocate effectively for their members, whether by influencing policy, securing funding,

or promoting better working conditions. Fragmentation weakens the guild-like structure that could otherwise regulate and elevate the profession, and it dilutes the collective bargaining power needed to address industry-wide challenges.

ix. Social Stigma and Perception of Vocational Trades

Despite the contributions of craftsmanship to the economy, there remains a stigma around vocational skills in Nigerian society. Many young people view vocational trades as inferior to academic qualifications, largely because of societal norms that prioritize university degrees over technical training. This perception hampers the growth of the craftsmanship sector and makes it harder for professional bodies to attract new members and future artisans. The lack of public recognition for craftsmanship as a viable career further exacerbates this issue.

x. Economic Constraints and Funding Challenges

Due to the informal nature of the sector, many mastercraftsmen professional bodies face challenges with financial sustainability. The inconsistent payment of membership fees and limited external funding leaves these bodies without the financial resources necessary to offer services such as training programs, certification, or advocacy. Without sufficient funding, professional bodies cannot provide the level of support required to improve the profession or implement strategies for long-term growth.

xi. Limited Policy Support and Government Intervention

Government policies often overlook the importance of vocational training and

craftsmanship in the broader economy. While there have been some initiatives to promote artisanship, a cohesive policy framework that supports mastercraftsmen remains absent. The lack of clear policies related to funding, infrastructure, and social security further limits the ability of mastercraftsmen professional bodies to improve standards and working conditions for their members.

Summary

The position paper emphasizes the vital role of Mastercraft men professional bodies in promoting and improving Nigeria's apprenticeship system. These bodies help standardize training, certify apprentices, advocate for vocational education, and adapt the system to meet modern market needs. However, challenges such as lack of government support, inadequate resources, and societal stigma persist.

Conclusion

This opinion paper argues that the role of Mastercraftsmen professional bodies in Nigeria is critical to the advancement of vocational training and the preservation of essential skills through the apprenticeship system. While these bodies have made significant strides in promoting structured training, certification, and advocacy, challenges such as lack of government support, informality, limited access to formal training, and inadequate resources continue to hinder their full potential. It is evident that to realize the economic and social benefits of these professional bodies, a more collaborative approach is needed. The government must prioritize and invest in vocational education, offering funding and policy support to strengthen apprenticeship systems. Additionally, these bodies must work towards

formalizing and regulating the apprenticeship process to ensure consistent quality and to prepare apprentices for a rapidly evolving labor market. Ultimately, Nigerian Mastercraftsmen professional bodies have the potential to drive economic transformation by creating a robust and formalized system of training and certification, empowering individuals and contributing to the nation's overall development. However, overcoming these persistent challenges will require coordinated efforts, both from within the sector and from external stakeholders, including the government, industry leaders, and society at large. Only through these collective actions can we ensure that craftsmanship and vocational training are respected, sustainable, and viable career paths for the future.

Recommendations

The paper recommends strengthening collaboration between professional bodies, government, and the private sector to formalize the system, enhance training, and improve public perception of vocational trades for long-term economic growth.

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